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ABSTRACT

In this speech, the newly appointed U.S. Commissioner of Education stresses the need for new partnerships between the educational community and its various constituencies and for more effective cooperation on educational matters between the federal government and state and local governments. In particular, he briefly discusses some of the Office of Education's plans for increasing state and local influence on new federal regulations and programs in order to increase the value and lessen the burden of federal educational programs. (JG)

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CREATING PARTNERSHIPS THAT WORK *

Edward Aguirre
U.S. Commissioner of Education

When I was growing up in Miami, Arizona, my family and friends believed wholeheartedly in partnership.

It took a lot of partnership to make it in Miami. It was -- and still is -- a small community near a great mountain of copper in the central Arizona desert. The economy is solely dependent on the mining of copper. I learned some important lessons in Miami about the value of mutual understanding and cooperation. They have stayed with me throughout my years as a school teacher and as an administrator in education and manpower development.

Last month I was sworn in as the U.S. Commissioner of Education. I am the twenty-second Commissioner in the 109-year history of the Office of Education. During all those years the Office of Education has been charged by Congress with keeping track of education's progress nationwide. For most of this century the Office has also been charged with providing leadership and funding to help education focus that progress.

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I have both my early Miami years and the Office of Education's mission in mind when I stress the importance of new alliances between the education community and the students, parents, taxpayers, and other constituencies it serves.

I'm pleased to see that some promising new partnerships are already shaping up. I participated in two meetings in Houston last week that show the kind of initiatives that educators and non-educators can generate when they come together in common cause.

One meeting was the Office of Education's own National Conference on Career Education. Some 8,000 people -- teachers, administrators, parents, industry spokesmen, Congressional aides, and some of you -- met for a realistic appraisal of what career education has accomplished and what still needs to be done to give students more choices in preparing themselves for a rewarding career.

The other meeting was sponsored by the National Education Association and some of the Nation's largest corporations -- American Cyanamid, General Motors, AT&T, and some 120 others. This group is exploring ways for industry and business to broaden their contributions to the educational process, knowing full well that the quality of education available to young people today will determine the quality of our social, political, and corporate leadership a generation from now.

Other creative partnerships are under way among local school districts seeking better academic programs, and I'm pleased that the Office of Education is helping to promote the exchange of new techniques and materials through its National Diffusion Network and National Clearinghouse System.

Without discounting these very important cooperative efforts, I think all of us in this room recognize that the most important partnership of all -- the one that most needs to work harmoniously and effectively -- is the partnership between the Federal Government and State and local governments.

I am acutely aware of the pressures on this relationship that result from the administration of Federal aid programs. And I share your awareness of the need to make better use of every Federal dollar going into education. I would like to talk for the next few minutes about some of the things we have been doing, and some things that I am initiating, to relieve the pressure on you and your local school systems and to make more effective use of Federal program dollars.

First, let me bring you up to date on our plans to implement the Education Amendments of 1976.

The Secretary, back in July, took some major steps to cut through the red tape that you and many other people involved in the administration of HEW programs says is nearly strangling them.

School and college administrators, like administrators concerned with health and welfare programs, have cited burdensome reporting requirements and legalistic language in program rules and regulations that some feel only an Oliver Wendell Holmes could understand. The Secretary has therefore directed the writers of program rules and regulations to "put it in English" even if this means attending classes in how to write in a simple, clear, expository way.

Much more important, he has opened up the regulation writing process to the public to a far greater degree.

Under the old system, draft rules and regulations were published in the Federal Register. After that came a 30-day period for public comment, and then came publication of final rules and regulations.

Now, before draft regulations are published, we must first publish for each new or changed program a Notice of Intent to Issue Rules and Regulations. The key word is intent. This is to alert the public to the fact that Congress has authorized a new program or changes in an on-going program that will require new rules and regulations. For major programs, the Notice of Intent will be followed by public hearings throughout the country before agency officials put on paper a single idea about how the program should work. These public hearings will help us develop workable drafts of regulations, which will be subjected to public scutiny before they become final.

The Secretary has delegated to me the authority to issue these notices of intent and to arrange for the public hearings. To do this, and to insure appropriate implementation of these efforts, I have in my immediate office a steering group to coordinate the various Bureau teams developing the actual regulation documents. Specifically, we have a task force working now on changes in vocational education regulations and another working on higher education regulations, as necessitated by the 1976 amendments.

My reason, by the way, for going into these new procedures in some detail is that I would especially welcome your insights and opinions during this formative stage. As Chief State School Officers, you are in an advantageous position. You know the views of decision makers at the State level. You know the concerns of local school boards and superintendents. You know about student needs and taxpayer pleas to get more out of every education dollar.

For all these reasons, I urge the CCSSO to set up task forces to work with us in the development of rules and regulations that school officials will find reasonable and workable and that will comply with the intent of Congress.

Final rules and regulations for every program covered in the 1976 Amendments must be published by next June 9 -- 240 days after the legislation was signed by the President. There is a great deal of work to be done in the next seven months. We need your help.

I might point out that we are required by the law to publish rules and regulations for 17 new programs for which final budget decisions have not been made for either FY 1977 or FY 1978. Included in this group are such programs as lifelong learning, research libraries, teacher centers, and vocational guidance and counseling.

Let me turn now to some initiatives I'm taking in areas I consider crucial to the improvement of educational programs and the more effective use of education money.

First, I am in the midst of forming a study group to recommend ways to strengthen the partnership between the States and the Federal Government. I intend to draw on creative and resourceful people in and out of government to examine ways to coordinate more effectively the total resources, human and financial, affecting the learner.

An example of the kind of thing I mean is education for handicapped children. Congress last year passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act. The Act says -- flat out -- that <u>all</u> handicapped children will have access to public education that meets their individual learning needs. States and local school districts must adhere to this directive. The law provides for a considerable increase in Federal funds to help the States and localities comply. At the same time, States are contributing heavily to the support of programs for handicapped children. I suspect there are many areas in which Federal and State funds can be better meshed -- to the benefit of the children in our society who need the most help.

Secretary Mathews has just appointed a blue ribbon panel to come up with recommendations to improve the management of student aid programs. The Secretary's charge to the panel was to simplify the application forms and procedures and give students more lead time to develop their financial aid package. The panel began public hearings last week.

In my judgment we also need a panel to determine whether financial aid can be made more accessible to students. A recent article in the New York Times pointed out that despite the availability of billions of aid dollars, many students may not be getting their maximum benefits because they don't know how to cope with the system. A student was quoted in the article as saying "Nobody knows the policies they work under, and nobody knows why they got what they did. It's just a gift from God, or something."

The Office of Education has spent a great deal of money in the past several years to spread the word -- through TV spots, flyers, guidance organizations, and student newspapers. Yet our office gets about 200 letters and telephone calls a week from parents who don't know which way to turn. We need to work on this, and we would welcome your suggestions.

Lastly, I see the need for a better coordinated effort between the vocational education delivery system and the manpower training delivery system at the Federal, State, and local levels. At the Federal level this would certainly require closer liaison between the Office of Education, with its adult and occupational education programs, and the Department of Labor, with its programs under the new Comprehensive Employment and Training Act. There should also be closer ties between these Federal agencies and the States in planning and implementing these programs.

So... there is much to be done. I am confident it will be done effectively -- in large measure because some long-standing partnerships are being strengthened and some promising new ones are developing.

A partnership that brings mutual trust, commitment, and creativity to a difficult task is one of society's really important assets. I am entirely aware that one of the most effective partnerships in education for a number of years has been the one between the Office of Education and the Chief State School Officers. I want to assure you, as a former Regional Commissioner and as Commissioner, that I want to do everything possible to continue to strengthen and build upon that very special partnership.

I hope you will let me know what you want me to do and how you want me to do it. How can we work together better? What ideas do you have that might make it all happen?

At least some of you, at one time or another, must have thought about what you would do--or attempt to do--if you suddenly found yourself appointed U.S. Commissioner of Education. A few of you would probably resign immediately. But, other than that, what would you like to see accomplished? I need that kind of help. I'm prepared to listen to your guidance and to try to make it mean something.

Most of you have had good things to say about the concept of the State Weeks which have been held at the Office of Education headquarters over the past couple of years. I agree that these occasions have been useful, especially in promoting closer working relationships between State and Federal education officials at several levels. Because of that, I am announcing today the continuation of the State Weeks. Members of my staff will be in contact with those of you who have not yet sponsored a State Week to set up a new schedule.

I think that's about enough from me today. You'll agree with me, I know, that it's a long way from Miami, Arizona, to Washington, D.C. And I'm not talking only about statute miles. It's almost a completely different ball game. But the rules are roughly the same. If you cannot develop partnerships that work--you're out. If you can, you at least have an opportunity to touch all the bases. Thank you.

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